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ALL EYES ON BIHAR AS ASSEMBLY POLL VOTE COUNTING TODAY

Elaborate security arrangements have been made for Friday's counting of votes polled across 46 centres in 38 districts of Bihar

ALL COUNTING CENTRES UNDER DRONE WATCH

Bihar had registered a historic voter turnout of 67.13 per cent in the elections to the 243-member assembly in two phases on November 6 and November 11. Some 7.45 crore voters were eligible to decide the electoral fate of 2,616 candidates. DGP Vinay Kumar said all counting centres will be guarded by Central Armed Police Forces and will be aided by drones

POSTAL BALLOTS FIRST, FOLLOWED BY EVM

■ Counting of votes will commence at 8 am. Postal ballot counting will begin first, and will be followed by counting of EVMs from 8.30 am
■ The fate of 2,616 candidates is locked in the EVMs. Among key contenders are Samrat Choudhary, Tejashwi Yadav, Bijendra Prasad Yadav, Vijay Kumar Choudhary, Lesi Singh, and Mangal Pandey | P12

67.13%

WAS THE VOTER TURNOUT—THE HIGHEST SINCE 1951—IN TWO PHASES

SC bins TN's pleas against K'taka's Mekedatu project

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain two applications filed by Tamil Nadu against Karnataka's move to construct a new reservoir at Mekedatu across the inter-state river Cauvery calling them 'premature'. While the first application challenged the permission granted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) to Karnataka for preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR), the second application was against the execution of the Mekedatu

project, seeking a direction to the CWC to return the DPR submitted by Karnataka.

The Karnataka government had submitted a DPR regarding the Mekedatu project to the CWC in 2018.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India B R Gavai, Justice K Vinod Chandran and Justice NV Anjaria on Thursday said the plan would be approved only after considering the objections of Tamil Nadu as well as the opinion of expert bodies such as the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) and the Cauvery Water Manage-



ment Authority (CWMA). "At this stage, the CWC order only permits the preparation of the DPR, that too after taking into consideration the objections of Tamil Nadu, and the expert opinion of the CWMA and CWRC," the bench pointed out. "It is further to be noted that

the CWC had further directed that the prior approval of the CWMA and CWRC would be a prerequisite for the consideration of the DPR. In that view, we find the present application is at a premature stage," the bench said.

The court also referred to its order passed in August 2023. "We reiterate what was observed in our order that we don't possess expertise. This court time and again has reiterated that this court should refrain from areas which are best reserved for experts," the bench observed.

K'taka cabinet discusses way forward for project

Bengaluru: The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court order on Mekedatu and discussed measures to implement the balancing reservoir project. "The cabinet discussed how to go about the project, as there are many steps to be initiated... we also have to prepare the DPR," Law Minister H K Patil said. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar termed the SC order as a victory for all Cauvery riparian states, as it would benefit both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu | P6



FORENSIC AUDIT OF VARSITY RECORDS ORDERED, ED TO TRACE MONEY TRAIL

UMAR HAD VIOLENT CHILDHOOD; JAISH DREW HIM BEFORE PAHALGAM ATTACK

Heat on Al-Falah's connections



Forensic officials inspect a red car in Faridabad, suspected to be linked to the Red Fort blast | PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Centre on Thursday ordered a forensic audit of all records of Al-Falah University in Faridabad, which is under scanner following a recent car blast near Delhi's Red Fort that killed 13 people.

Parallely, the Enforcement Directorate and other financial investigation agencies were directed to trace the money trail of the Haryana-based institution, even as investigators link several of its alumni and staff to an alleged "white-collar" terror network.

Further, the Association of Indian Universities suspended Al-Falah University's membership after a suspicious car, a Maruti Brezza, bearing a doctor's logo was found on its Dhauj (Faridabad) campus on Thursday. The vehicle is said to be registered in the name of Dr Shaheen Shahid, who is allegedly part of the terror ring.

Besides, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) issued a show-cause notice to Al Falah for fraudulent certification on its website. In its show-cause notice, NAAC said the university is neither accredited nor has applied for accreditation by NAAC.

Investigators from Delhi are in touch with police in Indore's Mhow town to dig deep into the past of Al-Falah University's founder Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui. Police sources said Jawad's brother was accused in cases of investment fraud in 2000.

EXPRESS READ

Cabinet gives nod for IT, space tech policies

Bengaluru: The Cabinet on Thursday approved a series of policies aimed to strengthen Karnataka's position as a technology hub. Prominent among them is the Karnataka Information Technology Policy, 2025-2030. The Cabinet also approved the Karnataka Space Technology Policy, 2025-30, and sanctioned setting up of Centres of Excellence (CoE) for AI & Computing Centre | P6

lected from the Red Fort blast site confirmed that Dr Umar Un Nabi was driving the car that exploded on Monday. Umar, who was known as an academically accomplished professional in his circle, allegedly turned radical over the past two years, police said.

Investigators found that three of the accused — Dr Umar Un Nabi, Dr Muzammil Ahmad Ganaie and Dr Shaheen Shahid — allegedly used a Switzerland-based encrypted messaging app to plan and coordinate their activities related to the terror conspiracy.

The police said the suspects had pooled more than ₹26 lakh in cash, which was handed over to Dr Umar for operational use. Using the pooled money, the group allegedly bought around 26 quintals of NPK fertiliser in Gurugram, Nuh, and nearby towns. The fertiliser, mixed with chemicals, is commonly used to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

Meanwhile, a medical college professor and a cardiology student, both from J&K and Al Falah alumni, were detained in UP. Dr Farukh, an assistant professor of obstetrics at Hapur's GS Medical College, was detained on Wednesday night. Mohammad Arif Mir (32), a first-year cardiology student of GSVM Medical College in Kanpur and from J&K's Anantnag, was picked up on Thursday as he was on the ATS radar following former GSVM professor Dr Shaheen Sayeed's disclosure to police during her interrogation. PTI

Umar body language shows Jaish training as a suicide bomber

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

DR Umar Un Nabi, who blew up a white Hyundai i20 car with him behind the wheel near Red Fort on November 10, was "probably recruited and later trained as a *fidayeen* (suicide bomber) by the Masood Azhar-led Jaish-e-Mohammed much before the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam," said well placed sources on condition of anonymity. Born on February 24, 1989, Umar completed his MD in Medicine at the Government Medical College (GMC), Srinagar, and later served as a senior resident at GMC, Anantnag before moving to Delhi.

"He was psychologically assessed during his tenure at GMC, Anantnag. It was found that he had very strong and inflexible ideological beliefs and had the potential to take extreme steps to execute his radical designs," said sources.

"Umar hails from a deeply disturbed background; of violence and abuse at home. In January this year, he had reportedly justified the concept of suicide bombing in closed circles," said sources. Recruitment in Jaish is a not easy. Only those with a pathological hatred towards India, who manage to clear tough assignments, are elevated, the sources informed. "That Umar was trained to be a *fidayeen* was also evident in his body language as he drove from Badarpur to Red Fort. He looked calm and undisturbed — a typical characteristic of a suicide bomber," they added.

As for Umar parking the i20 near the Red Fort for three hours, sources said, "He may have waited final instructions (to blow up). For a terror attack in Delhi/NCR, the final green light has to come from the highest echelons of the Jaish."

The Red Fort blast also killed Umar. DNA samples from the human remains in the car matched with that of his mother. Multiple agencies are investigating the manner in which the explosive laden car was detonated, said sources.

On the arrest of Dr Shaheen Shahid from Lucknow, sources said Jaish's recruitment of women is "inter-alia in response to Operation Sindoor in which India deployed its women officers from the armed forces to brief the nation on the details of the four-day precision strike on the terror infrastructure across the border, including Jaish's headquarters in Bahawalpur."



Masood Azhar (top) and Umar Un Nabi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN a setback for former Karnataka chief minister and veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa, the Karnataka High Court on Thursday refused to quash the POCSO case registered against him for allegedly molesting a minor girl during a meeting at his residence on February 2, 2024.

The HC upheld the order passed by the trial court on February 28 taking cognisance of the offences and issuing summons to Yediyurappa and three others. However, it asked the trial court not to insist on the presence of Yediyurappa during the trial, considering his age.

Justice M I Arun passed the order, disposing of two separate petitions filed by the former chief minister and three others, questioning the legality of the trial court's order. The three other petitioners were Aruna M, Rudresha Marulasiddaiah and Mariswamy G, who are accused No. 2 to 4.

"It has to be borne in mind that the trial court need not conduct a mini-trial while taking cognisance. It has been considered whether there are sufficient materials produced for proceeding against the accused. It is re-

quired to apply its mind and form an opinion by analysing the materials produced before it. The impugned order shows the trial court has done so. I do not see any error in the manner in which the trial court has taken cognisance of the offences alleged against the accused..." the judge observed.

The HC made it clear that the trial court should decide the case based on evidence, without being influenced by the observations of this court in earlier orders, as well as these petitions. P6



One of the sugarcane-laden tractors set on fire outside Godavari factory in Mudhol taluk of Bagalkot district on Thursday | EXPRESS

Protesters torch 100 cane tractors in Mudhol

FIROZ ROZINDAR @ Bagalkot

THE protest by sugarcane farmers in the district demanding Rs 3,500 a tonne took a violent turn on Thursday with the protesters torching nearly 100 sugarcane-laden tractors parked outside Godavari sugar factory in Sameerwadi village of Mudhol taluk.

According to reports, the incident flared up after several farmers, ready to supply sugarcane to the factory, started taking out tractors towards the factory. This irked the protestors, who had earlier called a bandh on Thursday, and started marching towards

Sameerwadi. In the village, an argument broke out between the two groups which escalated with throwing stones and torching of the parked tractors.

Videos of the tractors in flames went viral on social media. While there were no confirmed reports of the exact number of tractors that were burnt, unconfirmed reports suggested that at least a hundred vehicles were set on fire and several motorcycles parked nearby were damaged in the fire. Fire and emergency personnel rushed to the spot to douse the fire.

CONTINUED ON: P8

Sheikh Hasina case verdict set for Monday

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

BANGLADESH'S International Crimes Tribunal will on Monday deliver its verdict in the case of crimes against humanity filed against ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Prosecutors have sought death penalty for Hasina, now in India, accusing her of ordering lethal force against student protesters in July last year.

Former Bangladesh home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and ex-inspector general of police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun were also charged. Both Hasina and Kamal were tried in absentia. Al-Mamun later turned approver.

According to a UN report, 1,400 were killed in the Dhaka unrest, while government figures show 800 deaths.

Chief prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam alleged Hasina and her aides incited violence, ordering police and armed Awami League supporters to use deadly weapons against the demonstrators. The charges include murder, torture, extermination, and other inhumane acts.

Meanwhile, tensions have soared across Bangladesh ahead of the verdict. The Awami League has called a nationwide shutdown, leading to transport chaos and widespread school closures.



Sheikh Hasina

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